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THE WOMEN'S INDUSTRIAL NEWS

ORGAN OF THE WOMEN'S INDUSTRIAL COUNCIL (Incorporated),
7, JOHN STREET, ADELPHI, STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

Vol. XXI. NEW SERIES. No. 76—JANUARY, 1917.

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LONDON:
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VOL. XXI.—NEW SERIES. *No. 76—JANUARY, 1917.*

COUNCIL NOTES.

INDUSTRY AND MOTHERHOOD.

The inquiry of the Council into occupations and conditions of occupations likely to be injurious to motherhood is being conducted by Miss Clementina Black, assisted by Miss Agnes Kelley and by voluntary workers, among whom special gratitude is due to Mrs. Stanton Coit, who has spent much time in visiting the workers in their homes.

One of the Trades chosen has now been thoroughly investigated and the health of the women engaged in it and their children compared with that of women and their children living under identical conditions excepting that the mother does not go out to work at all.

The enquiry seeks to ascertain two main facts :—

(1) The effect of the given trade on women as prospective mothers.

(2) The effect on pregnant women.

And the investigators have in mind two classes of injuries which may be involved :—

(1) Those affecting the mother herself.

(2) Those affecting the health of the child, either before or after birth.

Offers of personal help and donations towards the Investigation Fund will be most gratefully received by the Secretary, Women's Industrial Council, 7, John Street, Adelphi, W.C.

THE SUGAR PROBLEM.

It is a great misfortune for working women that the various branches of legislation and administration are almost entirely in the hands of well-to-do men. Not because prosperous men are, on the whole, ill-meaning people; but because comprehension of the working woman's position is rendered difficult to them by the two facts of their sex and their prosperity. Such men having no realising sense either of what sugar means in the dietary of poor children or of the value of a shilling in a working-class budget, they have permitted (if not indeed ordained) that sugar shall be sold only to customers who spend at the same time a certain sum on other groceries. This will inflict no real hardship upon the housewives who habitually spend five to ten shillings every week at the grocer's. But for the working-class mother, compelled by the costliness of bread, milk, cheese and potatoes to restrict her grocery purchases to a shilling now and again it amounts to something very like actual prohibition. Some firms will sell no sugar unless three shillings are spent on other goods; others will sell

sugar only as an accompaniment to tea. Names of such firms are in the Council's possession at this moment. Thus, in practice, sugar is being reserved for the richer buyers—whose need of it is smaller.

The only fair way to restrict the sale of sugar would be to fix a maximum rate per head, the rate for children being higher than that for adults. After all, there are registration cards in the hands of the authorities for every man and woman under 60 and each card shows the number of children dependant upon every parent. It is a crying scandal that while a wealthy spinster in Kensington can easily, by dividing her purchases, secure nine pounds of sugar, the working mother of a family in Islington cannot possibly procure three pounds, even though the price is in her hand, and must spend at least half-a-crown (perhaps three-and-sixpence) to procure one pound of sixpenny sugar.

WOMEN CLERKS AND DRESS.

Among people recently prosecuted by the District Railway Company for travelling without paying and then pretending to possess season tickets were several women clerks. The magistrates—Sir George Truscott and Sir Charles Wakefield are named in the newspaper report—seem to have regarded it as an aggravation of the offence that the women were well dressed and do not seem to have made any enquiry as to the rates at which they were paid. It is, of course, an indefensible thing to try and cheat the railway company whose services one is employing; but the conditions in which women clerks are employed are too often such as to expose them to great temptation. Many of them, even in public offices, are paid but 20/- to 25/- a week. At the present prices of food and clothes it is impossible to be properly fed, lodged and clothed upon such weekly earnings; and since a presentable appearance is demanded by employers, economies cannot be made in the matter of clothes. Most women diminish their expenditure in food, and by and by break down. These culprits tried to economize by cheating the railway company. But the magistrates who commented so severely upon their neat exterior ought to understand that it is just because they are compelled to be well dressed that girls in their position are so hard put to it to pay their railway fares.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR GIRLS.

"All callings have their proper 'prentice time."

In years gone by the recognised and often the only way for a boy or girl to learn a trade was through the medium of apprenticeship.

This system has fallen into disuse of late years, and to engender and foster the spirit of craftsmanship in the future workmen and workwomen, it became necessary to provide some system of training which would replace apprenticeship and combine a practical insight into a trade with the continued education of the boy or girl.

In the case of girls part-time apprenticeship schemes, under which the learner spent a few hours each week in a technical school, were tried, but, from a variety of causes these were not attended by any large measure of success, and it was not until a new type of scheme, known as a Trade School, was established that an attempt was made to give girls a training which would fit them to take positions in a specified trade or branch of a trade.

The question of giving girls such a training is not fresh ground for the members of the Women's Industrial Council.

It was largely due to their pioneer work that the first of these schools was opened in London some twelve years ago.

Careful investigation had shown that in certain trades the prospects were excellent for a girl with a good working knowledge of the principles and processes concerned, and that employers were sympathetic towards the suggested training.

The trades in which the girls of London may be trained to-day are: dressmaking, ladies' tailoring, waistcoat making, millinery, corset making and lingerie work, upholstery, embroidery, photography, hairdressing, cookery and laundry work.

Every girl must be 13½ years of age or over before she enters a trade school. The training is definitely post-scholastic. The girls are drawn chiefly from the elementary schools; a few come from secondary schools, but these are not necessarily more capable of benefiting by the instruction.

The utilitarian aspect of the training receives much consideration and the curricula of the schools demand that a very considerable proportion of time should be spent upon practical work.

The hours of attendance are somewhat longer than those in the schools from which the girls have come. Thirty-five hours a week, i.e., seven hours a day, for two years is the time given in most of the schools, and this is roughly divided into two-thirds for trade processes and one-third for English, art work and physical exercises.

The schemes of work are the result of much thought and planning, and they are also the outcome of experience. In the early days the work was entirely experimental and modifications have been made as time went on.

A word or two as to the staff of a trade school. From the first it was decided that in order to make sure of the girls receiving instruction which would be of immediate use to them in the work rooms, the teachers of trade subjects should be women who had had the very best experience in that trade. The trade teachers are therefore not necessarily trained teachers, but they have been appointed after very careful selection on

consideration of their expert knowledge and length of experience in some very good firms.

In passing it may be noted that a piece of work which lies immediately in front of the trade school authorities is the provision of some practical training in the art of teaching in order to enable trade teachers to make the most of their exceedingly wide knowledge.

The art teachers require especially careful selection, for upon them devolves the important duty of infusing into the whole work that spirit of artistic value, the training of the hand to express what is presented to the eye, and the training in colour and form which will mean so much to the girl in her after life. The art-mistress spends a considerable amount of her time in the trade rooms, making herself thoroughly acquainted with the practical work which is going on and consulting with the trade teachers on all points of decoration, colour, &c.

The trade teachers, on their part, constantly send to the art room for advice or suggestion. It has been found that these happy relations between the art class and the trade classes have been the means of mutual help and advancement to both teachers and girls. To train the creative power, so that the imagination plays freely round the work is to implant that joy of labour which enables the girl to give her work individuality as well as beauty, and to gain that vision of life which makes all the difference between slavish imitation and conscious power.

On the staff of every trade school will be found one or more highly-qualified English teachers, whose duty it is to carry on the work already begun in the schools from which the girls are drawn, and it is largely due to the inspiring work done by these English teachers that the girls have been able to hold the good positions some of them have taken. The aim of the general educational work is to make each girl an intelligent worker and citizen, having some knowledge of economic conditions, how to keep herself healthy and efficient, and how to enjoy good literature.

Connected with each school are Consultative Committees of employers, whose periodic visits and criticism help to keep the work up-to-date and establish a connection between workroom and school.

From these schools during the past nine or ten years several hundreds of girls have passed into the work rooms of London, but compared with the large number of children who leave school each year and follow in some way or other the various trades and crafts of our country, the number is infinitesimal.

The need for skilled workers is more urgent than ever, and the evening classes in technical subjects, which have been in existence for a long time, have, from a variety of causes, such as late hours, overtime, domestic circumstances, and so on, failed to render much help to workers in the skilled industries.

The experience of eleven years in training girls for definite trades has made it very clear that besides a thorough grounding in the elementary principles of the work, it is necessary to help these girls, if they are to be leaders in their trade, to think, to decide and to act, to bring them under the influence of teachers who are able to inspire in them high ideals, as well as to obtain from them a high standard of manual dexterity.

The age at which specialisation is to begin should be very carefully considered in the light of mental development.

It is probable that even better results could be obtained by a scheme

which would give greater scope for the gradual development of the girl, and which would begin at an earlier age than fourteen and continue in some form after the pupil has passed into the business world.

Those who come into close contact with young people know that there are as many varieties and degrees of mental development as there are types of individuals, and it frequently happens that a girl who has passed through the greater part of her training with only indifferent success will, towards its end, show unsuspected ability and be able to take a good position in the work room. Others, who enter as brilliant children often pass through a stage of mental drowsiness and only in the latter stages of their training do they fulfil the promise of their earlier years; sometimes they fail even to do this.

One of the most encouraging features of the trade school movement is the work done amongst those who have passed through the schools and who continually come back for help and advice.

Many of them enter as students in the evening classes attached to the schools, and although often tired after a long day in the work room they are some of the most enthusiastic students.

The attachment of the girls to their schools is a very real thing, and as the years pass it is surely a good sign that those who marry and leave the trade in which they have been working are amongst the warmest supporters of the schools and most regular in their attendance at the periodic re-unions.

The influence of the training is seen in their home life; in their desire to express in their own homes some of those ideas which were inculcated in the schools through contact with beautiful objects and suitable surroundings.

Bearing in mind that these young people spend two of the most impressionable years of their life in the trade school, it goes without saying that the question of environment should and must be of vital importance.

It is too soon yet to make any statement as to the extent to which these trained workers may return to their trade after marriage, but it will be easily seen that equipped with conscious power, and with some knowledge of the relation of her own work to that of others, the girl who has been thus definitely trained for her work brings to it that spirit of professional pride which will neutralise to a very great extent the feeling of temporariness which is the cause of so much inefficiency in women's work.

The initial wage earned by a girl who has been trained in a trade school compares favourably with that of a girl who enters the same trade as an untrained worker two years earlier, i.e., upon leaving the elementary school; but although this fact is satisfactory in itself the criterion of the training is not its money value during the first year in the work room; it is after some experience of work-room ways has been obtained that increases become possible, and in some cases rapid. It is in this connection also that knowledge is power; those who know their market value are not likely to undersell their wares.

To extend vocational training on lines exactly similar to those now in force may not be feasible; questions of expense and accommodation must be considered. So far it has been possible to touch only the fringe of the subject, and experience goes to show that both before and after the specialised training there must be provision for a wider scope than at present exists.

The suggestion emanating from employers of dressmakers and others

that young learners should attend at a trade school during work-room hours in order to receive definite instruction in their trade is a step in the right direction and should be met by the education authorities with sympathetic treatment.

Much may be done, even in a shorter period, by teachers who make it their business to help their pupils, and if we can open the girl's eyes to the possibilities of her own home, and to the fact that in becoming a good craftswoman she may become something more, we have helped her to become a truer citizen in every sense of the word.

GIRLS AND BLIND ALLEY EMPLOYMENT.

The term Blind Alley Employment, so often loosely used and mis-used, is more often applied to the employment of boys than to that of girls. Experts in industrialism differ considerably in their definition of the term, and demonstrate that what is Blind Alley Employment for one life may easily prove profitable and progressive employment for another. What is meant by the term, however, though instances may vary, is briefly an employment that will not yield sufficiently high remuneration when the boy becomes old enough to require a man's wages, i.e., when the basis of his needs includes the maintenance of a home and family.

It is not the Employment that constitutes a Blind Alley job, it is the wages that go with it.

Fetching, carrying, lifting, running messages, are all done as the main part of their day's work by men as well as by boys, almost all unskilled men's work is of this character, the only difference in actual work being that the man must carry heavier weights than the boys, walk longer distances and exercise a little responsibility in respect of his work; in other respects the actual work done differs not at all between the man and the boy. The criterion of wages is thus the only one that can be applied with any degree of accuracy, and the " job " that will not yield a man's wages is the one that can justly be termed Blind Alley. Put in this way we see at once that most of the individual openings available for girls embarking on their industrial career come under the category of Blind Alley Employment. There are few women's employments that, even in the height of a trade boom, pay more than sufficient to keep a girl of 18 decently, according to the standard of life of her class. There are some exceptions and these will be dealt with later.

In the comparatively unskilled kinds of factory work, such as sweet-making and wrapping, jam and pickle making, tin and cardboard box making, tea and tobacco packing, bottle washing, chemcial packing and other kindred occupations, a girl attains her maximum rate of payment at about 18 years of age and can never get beyond that. Sometimes the rate of pay is time-work, averaging from 12/- to 15/- per week, sometimes it is piece-work, but even in the latter case she generally reaches her maximum of skill in three or four years from the time she starts, and will never be able to earn more, probably even less as she gets older.

The reason of this is not far to seek. It is of course that, in the majority of cases, industrial life, that is the regular employment of women for wages, ceases on marriage, which takes place between the ages of 20 and 25. Therefore all such employment is judged, and quite rightly judged, to be Blind Alley Employment. If marriage were finally to end the employment of women for wages, there would be very great cause for complaint against the general principle, and women's work would rank definitely with that of juveniles and not as adult work.

In the eyes of those who look ahead only for a short distance—and unfortunately are short-sighted in this respect—the fact that the girl's industrial life will be a short one points to the necessity of choosing some trade or occupation where the maximum is reached early, and of not wasting too long a time in learning a trade where proficiency is attained late, and the fruits are enjoyed for a comparatively short period. If a girl learns a trade such as cigar-making, which takes about five years, she is nineteen

and therefore within sight of marriage and retirement from the trade, almost at the time when she first reaches the summit of her proficiency. Thus for the years of her training, when her parents have supported her while she earned small wages, they will receive very little return in the higher wages she can earn as a journey-woman. Judged from this point of view alone the choice of occupations for girls seems very simple. If some occupation is chosen where the maximum wages are commensurate with her ability, they are reached at a comparatively early age, so that she can earn her full amount during the few years that she will continue to work—in short choose a Blind Alley Employment.

The almost universal occurrence of marriage, and consequent withdrawal from the labour market, of girls of the working class at 20 to 25 years of age, is the chief factor governing the employment of women. The girls themselves look upon marriage as the end of their industrial lives, and the employers accept it as a basic fact, and therefore find it waste of time and effort to train girls for more highly skilled work.

Unfortunately the affair is not really so simple and the probability of the need for a return to industrial life after marriage confuses the issue.

When a working-class woman finds herself under the necessity to earn money for the support of an invalid husband, or of herself and a fatherless family, in nine cases out of ten her only field of activity lies in domestic work of some kind. Having been employed before marriage as a factory-hand, in packing, feeding a machine or some other unskilled or semi-skilled work, she finds the ordinary factories closed against her, because only unmarried women are employed in a business that professedly only pays single women's wages, and her only hope is to earn a little by charing, washing or office cleaning. The not unnatural result is that the world—especially the London world—is full to overflowing of women seeking such work, women badly trained for the only work they can do, and living in the districts where such work is difficult to get, and at long distances from the middle-class suburbs where their services are in demand among households where no servants are kept, or where additional help is often desired.

This brings us to the consideration of domestic service as a career for women. Judged in the light of the foregoing tests, it seems indisputable that domestic service is one of the examples of Blind Alley Employments. The maximum is reached early, and there is very little prospect of employment in the same occupation after marriage.

There remains, however, a number of occupations or trades which can be resumed by women after marriage, and which are therefore well worth learning. The circumstances that must be taken into account are briefly these :—

(*a*) The centres of employment must be within reach of the working-class districts.

(*b*) The hours of work must be such that a woman can live at home, and give at least her evenings, Saturday afternoons and Sundays to her own domestic affairs.

These two considerations practically rule out private domestic service, even daily service.

Laundry work offers a large field for the employment of married women, and in some respects it is peculiarly suitable to their circumstances. They are seldom employed on a Monday, and the ironers often do not

start work till Wednesday. It is true that the hours of work are long on the days when they are employed, but this is compensated for by the short week, which enables them to attend to their own homes. This is a trade which depends on the work of married women to a large extent.

There are also a number of other trades, of a more seasonal character, which depend on such workers. Any trade which requires a considerable addition of skilled workers during long seasons, once or twice a year, presents a good field for the married woman's work. No remedy has yet been found for the difficulties and hardships entailed upon the workers in a seasonal trade. It seems impossible to avoid the incidence of the seasons, although, in times of normal trade, the differences between busy and slack seasons has been modified by a system of manufacturing for the colonial trade during the season of slackness in the home trade. This has been done largely in the wholesale clothing trade, especially in the making of women's clothes, blouses, costumes, hats, etc. It has not, however, affected the retail trade and the problem of migration from retail to wholesale dressmaking has not yet been fully solved, although the need for finding other employment for out-of-work high-class dressmakers during the early months of the war did something towards it and broke down many old prejudices.

There will, however, still remain many trades where extra skilled hands are needed in extra busy and well-defined seasons, and these trades depend on the married women.

Such, for instance, is the book-binding trade. For the greater part of the year there are enough workers in this trade, and not too many, to keep all the regular hands employed. But the two chief publishing seasons—Spring and Autumn and the chief advertising seasons—the Winter and Summer sales—make calls that the regular hands are not sufficient to meet. This trade depends entirely on the married book-folders for the extra workers and in practice the plan seems to work very satisfactorily.

The same can be said of machinists of all sorts, machinists of blouses, ready-made dresses, costumes, under-skirts, pinafores, and other garments too numerous to mention.

Of course it can be urged that the married woman who has to resume her trade because her husband is an invalid, or one who is a widow and has to keep her children, does not want occasional seasonal work—she wants a regular all-the-year-round job. But having obtained seasonal work in her own trade, the first of our facts comes into play to her advantage. Some of the regular workers will leave to get married, and so for a time will quit the labour market, and the married woman returned to her trade will have the chance of being retained as regular hand.

In returning to their old trade after an absence of some years, the women often find a difficulty in taking up the work again, partly because disuse has robbed them of their skill, but chiefly on account of changes and modifications which have been introduced since they left regular employment. New machinery with slight alterations, new fashions, new materials, all play their part in enhancing the difficulties of the worker who resumes work after a period of absence devoted to other forms of labour. And this brings us to another point worthy of attention. Such training as girls get is far too specialised and narrow in its limitations to be advantageous either to the girls themselves or to their employers. I fear it must be admitted that the girls themselves are very largely responsible in this

matter. The reluctance with which a girl, after much persuasion, will let herself be coaxed into trying a new process, or a new machine, the suddenness with which she will throw it up, because " she can't get on with it," are only equalled by the reluctance of ninety per cent. of foremen and women even to try a girl who has been working on a slightly different kind of machine. To take an example from the printing trade. Girls usually do the work of " laying on " and " taking off " sheets of paper on which the machine prints the matter. Printing machines are, in the trade, known by their names, " Wharfedales," " Croppers," " Platens," etc., and a girl who has been used to " laying on " on a " Wharfedale " will, in nine cases out of ten be refused employment if the machine she is wanted for is one of another make. The action of the hand will differ very slightly, the size of the paper is not the same and so on, therefore she will be refused employment on any but the exact pattern of machine to which she is accustomed. This is only one example of many which could be cited. The disadvantages of such limitations are so obvious that one need not enlarge upon them, and the remedy is surely not far to seek.

In all technical training, whether of the Trade Schools, the manual classes in the Elementary Schools, or the Technical Evening Institutes, greater attention should be given to developing a more adventurous spirit among the pupils. They should be encouraged to try their hands at a variety of crafts and processes to obtain great mastery over the general use of their hands, rather than the particular skill incidental to some process. In this way only can their conservative timidity be overcome, and in due course of time employers—as represented by foremen and forewomen, who are the worst offenders in this respect—will gradually awaken to the fact that a girl can sometimes be put to a job that she has never actually done before. Of course the war, and all the industrial upheaval incidental to it, has done much towards breaking down prejudice in this respect, but it must be candidly admitted that the prejudice is not altogether unfounded, and that wider and more comprehensive manual training is needed to enable women to keep up with the changes incidental to progress in any trade.

The problems connected with Women's Work and Wages are so many and diverse, so fundamental, and may it be added so obvious, that an apology is perhaps due for dealing at this length with what is possibly the best known and realized of all the difficulties. Everyone knows the facts stated above, and yet their very familiarity is sometimes a cause of their being overlooked or ignored.

If, on what Sidney Webb calls the " Outbreak of Peace," training schemes are started for women and new openings are to be looked for in the Industrial General Post which we are warned to expect, it may not be inopportune to suggest that these well-known factors shall be borne in mind.

REVIEWS.

"LIFE SAVING IN WAR TIME," a Campaign Handbook, by Mabel Palmer, M.A., with an introduction by the Rt. Hon. Arthur H. D. Acland. Compiled for the Infant Welfare Propaganda Committee, 4, Tavistock Square, London, W.C. (C. Arthur Pearson, Ltd. 1/- net.)

This handbook is in itself an able review, not only of the work that *is* being done, but also of the further measures that should be taken to cope with the problems of Maternal and Infant Welfare in this country. In an introduction the Rt. Hon. Arthur Acland points out the national importance of the movement—which is accentuated at the present time by the loss of life and of potential fatherhood caused by the War. "We are draining the nation of its best lives in our fight for national honour," . . . he writes, yet some authorities "have deliberately put the matter off 'till after the War,' as though it was not *now*, just when we are losing month by month thousands of splendid men's lives, that we want to save other lives to help the nation in its need later on."

Roughly speaking Mrs. Palmer states, we have about 880,000 live-births in the year, and with a death-rate of about 100 (per 1000) we lose 88,000 babies per annum. If, therefore, the death-rate could be reduced to about 50, we would save over 40,000 lives a year; and this, the writer considers, is not too Utopian an ideal to be aimed at—"not only in the future, but immediately, by a nation alive to the importance of this, its most precious form of wealth."

Mrs. Palmer touches on the decline of the birth-rate, and the only too strong probability of its further decline in the coming years; on the causes of infant mortality: the needs and difficulties of the mother both in crowded urban and in lonely country districts: on the problems of housing and sanitation: the provision of skilled and sufficient attendance in confinements: the employment of mothers: the supply of pure milk: and other questions which should engage the persistent attention of those who would foster a sturdy generation. But while reform in some of these matters may be slow and difficult of attainment, we can, "not . . in the future, but immediately," make use of the facilities and support offered by the Local Government Board and the Board of Education to Infant Welfare Centres and Schools for Mothers. In a joint circular issued by the two Boards in May, 1915, grants are offered to local authorities, and to approved voluntary associations amounting to one-half the cost of these centres where the work is satisfactorily carried out. And it is vastly encouraging to learn that since 1913 centres have increased from about 200 to nearly 750. That much work still remains to be done, however, is seen when we read that these organisations cater only for 60,000 of the 600,000 babies who need such attention. The object of this handbook is to show how this machinery may be used, and where information and advice to intending workers may be obtained. The Association of Infant Welfare and Maternity Centres at 4, Tavistock Square, London, W.C., "provides a clearing-house of information" for all administrative work connected with the health of infants. In presenting these data for reference in a concise and readable form Mrs. Palmer has done a real service, and the volume should be read from cover to cover by all who are interested in this vitally important national work.

THE WOMAN—BLESS HER: NOT AS AMIABLE A BOOK AS IT SOUNDS: by Marjory MacMurchy. Toronto. Gundy, $1. 1916.

Women's organisations in Canada form the subject of this oddly-named little book, viz., societies to promote nationalism or imperialism, temperance, social reform, also clubs for the study of literature, travel, social science, the arts, etc.; occupational clubs; political societies and trade unions, and missionary societies. Canadian women, we are told, have a genius for organisation, and the national character of their associations is an achievement of real social value. Distance appears to be no obstacle, and any single association may have branches in widely distant towns. But the work of these manifold societies is carried on by a fraction of the female population, and "for one woman who belongs to a national association eight do not," which suggests that in spite of obvious differences, social conditions in the great Dominions have considerable affinity with our own. A particularly interesting chapter is devoted to the Woman At Home, emphasing the vital importance of the home-maker having an intelligent comprehension of the economic forces that control markets and determine her spending power and the well-being of the family.

There are occasional roughnesses or weak places in the style, but as a whole "The Woman—Bless Her" gives an extremely fresh and interesting account of our far-off sisters, especially in relation to the war and the new activities it has brought them.

B.L.H.

JUL 10 1919

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